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F708CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP
INTELLIGENCE REPORT

COUNTRY Syria/Egypt

DATE: 25X1X

SUBJCT: Syrian Telephone and Radio Communications

INFO: [REDACTED]

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DIST: 28 March 1947

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SUPPLEMENT

Allotment of Funds

1. The largest single projected expenditure of the Syrian Government for 1947 is for the creation of an automatic telephone system and radio broadcasting station. The sum allotted is LLS 27,000,000. It does not appear in the published budget, but has been allotted from the government's accumulated reserve, and is not accountable for by ordinary procedures, but is to be spent over the sole signature of the Director General of Posts and Telegraph, Tawfiq al-Hayyani. This sum is greater than the total budget of any single government department, is equal to about one-fourth of the total published budget for 1947, and constitutes some 67% of the accumulated reserve.

The Government's Project

2. The project which has been established is that of a government-owned and operated telephone system and broadcasting station, which is estimated to cost LLS 15,000,000, exclusive of buildings. The buildings will cost an additional LLS 12,000,000. Tables of specifications for the telephone system and broadcasting equipment were prepared by a commission of 15 technicians from the Egyptian State Telephone Service, who were employed by the Syrian Government for six months. Plans for the necessary buildings were drawn up under the supervision of these technicians by the Damascus architect, Fu'ad al Husayni.

Construction Plans

3. Seven volumes of tables of specifications were sent to each of four American, four British, one Swedish and one Czechoslovakian firm on 1 December 1946. Bids were to have been submitted by 1 March 1947, and the contracts will be awarded on 1 June 1947 for delivery within one year. The contracts will be awarded, not on the basis of price, but on the ability to supply, and preference will be given to several different companies rather than one. The equipment is to be installed by representatives of the contracting firms, under the supervision of two Egyptian technicians and with the assistance of Syrians especially assigned for the task.

Buildings

4. Projected buildings include an Exchange and Administration Building and a Broadcasting Studio, to be built in Damascus on the south side of Shari'

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al-Nasr, on the sites of the former Charkess Barracks and Police School. The broadcasting antenna will be erected at Sabburah in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, 17 kilometers west of Damascus and 11 kilometers northeast of Qatana.

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Comment: The appropriation of the major portion of the government's accumulated and jealously-guarded reserve for this purpose and in this way is a personal triumph for Tawfiq al-Hayyani, an astute civil servant and former judge, who has known how to refrain from active politics while remaining influential with the group in power. The government's decision was prompted by its somewhat naive conception of an automatic telephone system as the obvious symbol of modernism and progress, and by its belief that through a broadcasting station it could form and control public opinion in Syria and wield greater influence in the Arab world. The project has assumed its present form because the government in general, and former Prime Minister Jabri in particular, fear both foreign concessions in any form and the control of any public service by a foreign group or power.

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